

# News Release

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### **White House Initiative Spurs Native American Economic Development**

#### ***President's Healthy Forests Initiative to Help Native American Tribal Areas***

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Small Business Administration will assist in the economic development of Native American small businesses by supporting the creation of 20 firms that will reduce wild land fire risks to people, communities and the environment.

The establishment of these Native American firms is part of the SBA's implementation of the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, designed to reduce the threat of destructive wildfires to the nation's forests, communities and endangered species. The President's initiative has prompted forest restoration projects that include clearing forests of underbrush and trees to improve forest health and to benefit surrounding communities.

"The President has made forest health a high priority, and will continue to promote forest conservation and restoration," Hector V. Barreto, SBA Administrator said. "Under the Healthy Forests Initiative, this Administration has acted to remove the causes of severe wildfires by thinning forest undergrowth before disaster strikes, and the development of Native-American small business ownership will help to ensure a healthy environment and continued economic growth and job creation."

The Healthy Forests Initiative allows federal agencies to enter into long-term contracts with small businesses, communities and nonprofit organizations to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. This effort establishes a framework for protecting communities and the environment through thinning, planned burns and restoration projects.

The SBA recently contracted with the Intertribal Information Technology Co. (IITC), to develop and train 20 Native American forest restoration companies that will participate in forest restoration and preservation. The IITC is a multi-tribal 8(a) firm teamed together to build information technology business on Native American lands, and is an advocate for reservation economic development.

The IITC will help to establish the forest restoration companies, as well as help the firms to bid on Healthy Forests Initiative contracts with the federal government. The creation of these Native-American owned reservation-based companies is vital to the advancement of forest restoration projects, and will help to reduce fire danger and return the nation's forests and rangelands to a healthier state.

Nearly 50 percent of all forest fire fighters in the nation are Native Americans. Participation in forest restoration contracts would provide Native American fire fighters with year-round employment and spur entrepreneurialism in American Indian tribal areas. In the past two years alone, more than 147,000 fires burned nearly 11 million acres in the country.

For more information on Native American business development through the Healthy Forests Initiative project, contact project director Malcolm Bowekaty with the IITC at 505-870-3363.